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Wednesday, Sept. 10, 2008

## Prevailing wage law passes County Council, 7-2

Dissenters wary of cost

by Janel Davis | Staff Writer

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The County Council passed a prevailing wage law for construction workers on county projects despite concerns from some council members that the county could not afford it.

The bill sponsored by Councilwoman Valerie Ervin, with five of her council colleagues as co-sponsors, passed the council Tuesday with a 7-2 vote.

As passed, the prevailing wage would be paid on county awarded or financed projects valued at more than \$500,000.

The county will use the prevailing wage rates established by the State Commissioner of Labor and Industry. Each year the county bids out about \$100 million in construction projects. Sample hourly state rates range from \$33.82 for steam and pipe fitters to \$11.50 for plaster handlers.

"Government has a responsibility to make sure that working families are paid a fair wage to ensure self-sufficiency; otherwise, we all pay in the long-run with higher costs for social services and housing assistance," said Ervin (D-Dist. 5) of Silver Spring in a statement after the vote.

Ervin's legislation was also supported by the unions.

Councilmen Philip M. Andrews and Don Praisner cast the dissenting votes.

"I am not persuaded that this bill will not have any economic impact to the county. I don't think this is the right time for the bill," said Praisner (D-Dist. 4) of Calverton before the vote.

Rockville small business owner Ellen Exelbert also disagreed with the legislation.

"We think this is unnecessary and increases costs to taxpayers and businesses in the county," said Exelbert, who operates a plumbing, heating and air conditioning company. "Some of the salaries with the prevailing wage attached will be more than what teachers make. This is not a living wage, it is way beyond that," she said.

To manage the program, the county anticipates adding one new position at \$69,430 in fiscal 2009. Random audits are estimated to cost \$36,000. The law may also increase bid prices on county construction contracts with contractors having to pay higher wages.

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County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) supports the bill and is expected to sign it. The bill is set to take effect July 1, 2009. The County's Department of General Services will be responsible for enforcement, and the county is allowed to withhold payments if contractors violate the law.

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